

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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7 October 2005



New Home for Brown Ale

I visited the new Newcastle/Federation Brewery in Dunston to see how things have progressed following the transfer of the operation from the Tyne Brewery in Newcastle to the old Federation site. Several improvements have been made to the plant and more are planned. Newcastle Brown Ale is now in full production. New signage will be going up soon to advertise the new home of Brown Ale to all, especially the thousands who pass by daily on the Western By-pass.

BENFEST

I attended the North Benwell 'Benfest' where local residents had a great day for their summer fair with lots of stalls and activities. I was pleased to bump into Newcastle councillor Jed Bell who as a local Fire Of-



ficer was giving a spectacular demonstration of what not to do if the chip pan ignites and a range of other fire safety advice.



Keeping Gateshead Warm



I opened the Keep Gateshead Warm road-show which provides information on the help available for insulation of homes against the cold weather in an area where it is estimated up to 20% are living in poorly insulated homes.

Shaftoe Court Summer Fair

I officially opened the Shaftoe Court Summer Fair which was launched in impressive style by a marvellous performance from the Newcastle Pipe Band along with Scottish dancing. The residents and staff and their visitors had a great day with refreshments and a massive tombola and raffle with some very impressive prizes.

Comment

A curious coincidence of focus on leadership for all three party conferences - the Lib Dems, locked in anguish as to whether their leader is up to the job, the Tories with more front runners for the post than the Grand National, and our own with a re-run of the media speculation about the Blair/Brown axis.

Personally, and given the tendency of the news media to damn the government whoever is Prime Minister, and members of the Party to damn the leadership whoever it may be, I think the shorter the period between the election of the new leader and the next general election the better.

The Labour Party Conference in Brighton was the first since the General Election and an opportunity for the Prime Minister to spell out Labour's plans for the next Parliament.

As well as further local government reform, he promised an Education White Paper offering new ways to give the chance of a first class education for all Britain's children and not only for the elite.

Further NHS reforms to bring in new providers, and to allow more patient choice and, for the first time in the history of the NHS, to offer booked appointments at the patient's convenience and a maximum wait of 18 weeks from first appointment with a GP to the operating theatre.

Later, the Health Secretary assured conference that she did not expect more than 1% of the NHS budget ever to be in the hands of the private sector but, in the subsequent vote, conference opposed the government's plans for further expansion of the private sector role.

On pensions, Tony Blair promised to publish plans next year for reform on the basis of a 'proper basic state pension and alongside it - because the state cannot provide it all - a simple, easy way for people to save and reap the rewards of their savings.'

On childcare, he promised - again for the first time ever - 'affordable, wrap around childcare between the hours of 8am to 6pm for all who need it.'

The Prime Minister also promised to give local communities the powers they need to hold people to account.' He went on to promise 'a uniformed presence' on the street in every community which might mean more policemen on the beat or more community support officers as well as an extension of powers to local authorities and police to tackle binge-drinking, drug-dealing and organised crime. He wanted to see more competitive sport in schools, more places for youngsters to go and more disciplinary powers for headteachers.

Despite the impetuous actions of an over-zealous steward, all in all, Labour had a good conference - brilliant in contrast with the angst-ridden Lib Dems and the squabbling Tories.

The PM also took the opportunity to remind delegates of some of the many pluses of a Labour government, often forgotten in the rush to find fault. The Minimum Wage, Sure Start, Paid holidays for all workers, Winter Fuel Allowances, a million pensioners' homes insulated, record Child Benefits, huge increases in Third World Aid and debt relief...etc.

Predictions that Iraq would dominate the conference proved incorrect as I thought they would.

However, Iraq continues to dominate media headlines, with the increasing violence of the insurgents.



Constituency



I joined the Mayor of Gateshead at the opening of the Bensham/Saltwell residents' Summer Fair in Saltwell Park, a great venue for this year's event.



I attended the Lobley Hill and Bensham Labour Party Branch meeting where there was a lively discussion across a range of issues. I visited the new Newcastle/Federation Brewery in Dunston and got the impression that the future is much more secure for the continued presence of brewing on the site. I attended the launch, by Minister David Milliband, of the Manifesto of the Association of North East Councils. An impressive document that shows our local councillors are well in touch with the needs of the region.